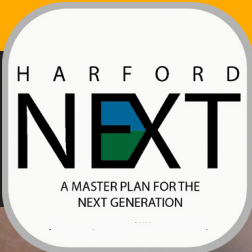


PROMOTING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES



A Master Plan for the Next Generation





PROMOTING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

Healthy communities are built upon active residents empowered to be champions for their own wellbeing. Based on the premise that all Harford County residents deserve the opportunity to live long and healthy lives, HarfordNEXT proposes unique initiatives and strategies that support strong and vibrant communities that foster the health of its citizens. The Promoting Healthy Communities theme outlines policies and implementations emphasizing healthy and active lifestyles, access to healthy food choices, efficient delivery of health and social services, and ensuring the safety and preparedness of our communities. This framework is organized through the development of four principles: Foster Healthy Lifestyles and Active Living For All Harford County Residents, Provide Safe Communities, Provide Access To Healthy Food Choices For All Harford County Residents, and Support Efficient and Effective Delivery Of Health and Social Services Throughout Harford County.

State Visions:

*Environmental Protection
Resource Conservation
Stewardship
Public Participation
Quality of Life and
Sustainability
Housing
Economic Development
Implementation*

Overlapping Themes:

*Grow with Purpose
Environmental Stewardship
Preserving our Heritage*

Background

Harford County provides many venues for physical and social activity; County parks and recreation centers, modern children's playgrounds, state parks, regional trail systems, and passive outdoor educational facilities like the Anita C. Leight Estuary Center form a highly regarded system of recreational facilities.

Healthy communities are characterized not just by their facilities but their capacity to support active lifestyles, provide connections to jobs and services, and encourage walking and bicycling as part of a daily routine. Healthy communities are also defined by their emergency preparedness and resilience; planning for natural disasters and other crises is crucial to ensuring the continuation of services after an emergency event. Similarly, achieving adequate medical, fire, and police response times to every part of the County ensures critical services are available to all when needed.

Creating and maintaining safe and healthy communities remains a top objective for County agencies, and HarfordNEXT provides strategies that will help achieve this vision through changes to the built environment while additional policies address emerging or chronic health issues such as asthma, obesity, and addiction. The goals and objectives explored in this theme are intended to encourage healthy and resilient communities with the ultimate goal of reversing negative trends. This approach is supported by Healthy Harford, a coalition of government agencies, local businesses, and non-profit organizations dedicated to making Harford County the healthiest community in Maryland. To be successful in our venture, Harford County and its partners must adopt a sustainable approach to land use planning that promotes healthy, vibrant communities and ensures the safety and wellbeing of its residents.

Healthy Lifestyles

Harford County is committed to providing an environment that encourages daily physical activity and promotes walking and biking as alternatives to using the automobile. Communities across the country are recognizing the link between our built environments and physical and mental health and wellness. Land use decisions, community design, and transportation planning have a direct effect on the rates of obesity, incidence of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and mental illness, and personal injuries. Therefore, health and wellness must be incorporated into the planning process by engaging stakeholders across various government agencies and disciplines.

HarfordNEXT supports the creation of safe and convenient opportunities for outdoor recreational activity while providing adequate recreational services and facilities to accommodate year-round activity for a diverse population. Building on the success of the Ma and Pa Trail system, HarfordNEXT also supports further development of trails and pathways throughout the County that will connect people to community amenities and promote social interaction. Walkable communities are a key component of a healthy and active community.

Empowering citizens to increase physical activity and make health a priority is crucial to changing societal attitudes toward maintaining healthy lifestyles. The Promoting Healthy Communities theme promotes initiatives that reach vulnerable populations at an increased risk of developing obesity and other chronic diseases.

Safe Communities

Public safety is frequently a top priority for a jurisdiction, and Harford County remains committed to providing first rate emergency assistance and maintaining readiness. The County is served by 12 volunteer fire and ambulance companies that annually respond to over 32,000 calls for emergency medical or fire response assistance; police emergencies are handled by the Sheriff's Office and the Maryland State Police. To maintain acceptable response times, emergency services and post-disaster resilience should be incorporated into the decision-making process across various sectors and policy areas.

Food Choices

Access to fresh foods and produce is a core tenant of healthy lifestyles. HarfordNEXT acknowledges that creating healthy communities in Harford County relies on improving connections between producers and local markets, which also benefits agricultural producers who look to bring locally grown fruits and vegetables to the tables of our citizens and restaurants. Farm-to-table programs and other initiatives, such as community gardens, farmers markets, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), urban farms, and food hubs, can help preserve our agricultural heritage by providing markets for local farm products while achieving better wellness throughout Harford County communities.

Access to Services

Maintaining healthy communities requires a holistic approach to delivering health services, one that contemplates the various physical, social, and mental health challenges trending in Harford County and commits resources to provide assistance efficiently and effectively. Statewide, Harford County reports higher than normal incidences of chronic lung disease, Lyme disease, colorectal and lung cancers, obesity, diabetes, and drug related deaths. Coupled with the growing problem of addiction, these physical and social problems create a formidable constellation of health issues facing the County.

Many health issues can be influenced by the physical design of our surroundings. For example, obesity and diabetes rates are more prevalent where recreational facilities are lacking or not readily accessible. The correlation between land use planning and healthy communities is discernible when observing other physical health concerns, including asthma, certain forms of cancer, and cardiovascular disease. However, the relationship between community design and health is not limited to the built environment of a specific place. Necessary facilities should be planned for and located where they can be conveniently accessed, and assuring services are available in different parts of the County means coordination must occur between agencies.

While some common physical health problems can be aided simply by providing opportunities to pursue active lifestyles, other issues will require a more concentrated and collaborative approach. Substance use disorders cover a range of social health issues; in Harford County, alcohol abuse and drug addiction remain serious problems that must be addressed. Heroin use in particular is a growing problem throughout Harford County. Improving the situation requires adopting a multi-disciplined community approach that includes medical and health care professionals, government and community leaders, law enforcement, teachers, and parents.

Growing Harford HEALTHY

95%

LIVE CLOSE TO EXERCISE OPPORTUNITIES



34.8
miles of trails

Fresh
Convenience

Future
Park & Ride
Farmers'
Markets

3

FARMERS'
MARKETS



Bel Air
Farmers'
Market



Edgewood
Farmers'
Market

Havre de Grace
Farmers'
Market



Food
Insecure
Areas



= Income & vehicle
access limit
healthy food
options

Farm
to
School

Local Farm
Produce
in Harford County
Public Schools

Farm
to
Health

7 CSAs
(Community
Supported
Agriculture)

Community
Bounty

4 Community
Gardens
in Harford
County



9% Food Insecurity

3% Lack of Access
to Healthy Food

Sources: County Health Rankings & Roadmap, 2015, Healthy Harford, USDA Economic Research Service, Harford County Public Schools

Principles, Goals, and Policies for Promoting Healthy Communities (PHC):

FOSTER HEALTHY LIFESTYLES AND ACTIVE LIVING FOR ALL HARFORD COUNTY RESIDENTS

Goal PHC 1.1: Promote wellness and prevention.

Rationale: Encouraging overall wellness increases the quality and years of a healthy life, reduces long term costs, and lessens the burden on our healthcare system.

Implementation

(a) Develop regular channels of communication and collaboration between local health officials and planners utilizing the collective impact model to establish health goals across agencies.

Collective impact is a collaborative approach to solving complex social problems where groups from various sectors align their efforts to establish a common agenda and goals.

(b) Build healthy and safe communities that encourage increased physical activity and reduce pollution (e.g., workplace flexibility, rideshare and vanpool programs, Park and Ride incentives, travel demand management initiatives, and telecommuting options).

(c) Expand access to preventative health services.

(d) Empower citizens to make healthy choices and lead an active lifestyle through policies and programs that make healthy options the easy choice.

(e) Support drug intervention programs with a specific emphasis on school-aged children.

Healthy Harford is the healthy communities initiative of Harford County that is dedicated to improving the health of Harford County residents through education, policy changes, and improvements in the built environment.

(f) Promote coordination between health care providers and local public health resources and programs, such as Healthy Harford and the Harford County Health Department.

(g) Support the objectives of Healthy Harford and the annual Healthy Harford Day.

(h) Develop and promote Healthy Designation programs for restaurants, workplaces, schools and child care centers.

(i) Bring together multi-disciplinary providers for information sharing and cross training of addiction and mental health.

(j) Investigate ways to promote behavioral health screenings within primary care and urgent care practices.

(k) Encourage the sharing of resources between addiction specialists and mental health providers.

(l) Raise community awareness around prescription drug use, treatment and monitoring as well as misuse, storage and disposal.

(m) Educate the public on the health benefits of increased physical activity.

(n) Encourage property owners to designate smoke-free housing units.

Goal PHC 1.2: Locate health services to afford the maximum level of access to all residents.

Rationale: Providing access to

comprehensive, quality health care services is crucial in achieving overall wellness and health equity.

Implementation

(a) Develop a program to assess the service needs of vulnerable or underserved populations in the County and measure resident's access to appropriate, safe, and effective care, including clinical preventive services.

(b) Work to decrease disparities and measure access to care for diverse populations, including racial and ethnic minorities and older adults.

(c) Ensure access to safe long-term and hospice care services.

(d) Support the colocation of facilities to expand the reach of health services.

(e) Encourage hospitals and health service providers to integrate physical, oral, mental, and public health services with a focus on addressing social determinants of health.

Goal PHC 1.3: Create safe and convenient opportunities for outdoor recreational activity.

Rationale: People are more likely to utilize parks and trails when they are safe and conveniently located.

Implementation

(a) Conduct walkability audits to identify gaps in connectivity or dangerous routes; prioritize infrastructure improvements that establish connections to parks and schools.

(b) Encourage shared facilities with schools, especially in neighborhoods that suffer a disproportionate lack of recreational facilities.

(c) Evaluate standards for trails, connections, community gathering places and other community amenities for new residential projects.

(d) Ensure a safe and secure environment at all county parks and recreation facilities and track incidences of crime.

(e) Examine ways to mimic Blue Zone communities.

A Blue Zone is a place where people live measurably longer, healthier, and productive lives.

(f) Develop signage to mark Lyme endemic areas and promote prevention of tick-borne diseases.

Goal PHC 1.4: Provide adequate recreational services and facilities to accommodate year-round activity for a diverse population.

Rationale: Recreational facilities and programs should accommodate different users and be available throughout the year.

Implementation

(a) Follow the recommendations of the County's Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan.

(b) Achieve target of 30.0 acres of recreational land for every 1,000 residents.

(c) Acquire additional recreation land, including waterfront properties, to help meet the needs of current and future residents.

(d) Offer a range of specialized programs for seniors.

(e) Work with Harford Transit to ensure access to parks and recreation facilities throughout the County.

(f) Develop additional community centers in appropriate areas.

(g) Monitor usage trends and add recreational opportunities and facilities that meet the needs of all segments of the public.

(h) Develop complementary facilities in support of the destination recreation/sports tourism market.

(i) Strengthen the development review process to ensure that future land dedications are appropriate additions to the County's system of parkland and open space.

Goal PHC 1.5: Develop a system of trails and pathways to connect people to common destinations such as libraries, schools, parks, and commercial centers.

Rationale: An extensive system of convenient and safe trails that provide connections to common destinations will encourage walking, bicycling, and social interaction and reduce vehicle trips.

Implementation

(a) Set a walkability standard of $\frac{1}{4}$ mile for residents' access to recreational facilities within the development envelope.

(b) Ensure that pedestrian routes and sidewalks are integrated into continuous networks.

(c) Encourage property owners to maintain trails and sidewalks, especially during the winter months.

(d) Initiate a trail sponsorship program whereby individuals and business can support the upkeep and maintenance of the trail.

(e) Regularly review and update the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan to set priorities and reflect new opportunities for connections.

Goal PHC 1.6: Establish communities that facilitate walking as part of a regular daily routine.

Rationale: Physical activity is important to achieving a balanced healthy lifestyle, which reduces stress and lowers the risk of certain diseases associated with sedentary lifestyles. Residents of walkable communities are more likely to achieve the recommended amount of daily exercise.

Implementation

(a) Identify opportunities to acquire properties within the Development Envelope for recreational uses that can help achieve the established walkability standard.

(b) Establish design guidelines that support complete streets and universal design principles.

(c) Use traffic calming techniques to improve safety and access.

(d) Require new development to meet level of service standards for pedestrians and cyclists in addition to those established for cars.

(e) Expand the Safe Routes to School program so that students across the County can safely walk and bike to and from school.

PROVIDE SAFE COMMUNITIES

Goal PHC 2.1: Pursue an integrated strategy to reduce crime in new and existing communities.

Rationale: An effective crime control strategy is one that integrates community policing efforts with the actions of citizens who are vigilant and engaged in their communities.

Implementation

(a) Support community policing, neighborhood watch, and police patrols that engage community residents.

(b) Utilize resident survey data, systematic social observations, and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessments to analyze and target specific problems within communities.

Crime prevention through environmental design is a multi-disciplinary approach to deterring criminal behavior through environmental design.

(c) Pursue a program to beautify residential and commercial properties and provide incentives for aesthetic enhancements to buildings in order to generate a sense of pride and ownership which can also increase property values.

(d) Promote programs that encourage volunteerism that focuses on crime prevention; such as Neighborhood Watch, Community Policing, DARE and National Night Out.

(e) Identify and restore “anchor points” such as parks, community centers, or other specific places. These anchor points are frequented by neighborhood residents and serve to build strong communities and provide opportunities to transmit information about the neighborhood to other residents, and provide residents with a sense of personal investment in the community.

(f) Support school programs that educate students on crime prevention and community safety.



Grant funding helps support educational outreach on the dangers of heroin.

Goal PHC 2.2: Ensure that emergency services adequately serve all Harford County residents.

Rationale: Harford County must accommodate the diverse needs of an expanding service area while providing innovative, cost-effective, and clinically sophisticated emergency medical services.

Implementation

(a) Ensure that new emergency medical service facilities are strategically located in order to achieve the most efficient response times to the areas they serve.

(b) Work with Emergency Operations and the Harford County Volunteer Fire and EMS association to develop an emergency medical service strategic plan.

(c) Work with the Harford County Volunteer Fire and EMS Association to recruit new volunteers and retain existing volunteers to serve their communities.

(d) Offer advanced training to first-responders to maintain rescue capabilities.

(e) Maintain and upgrade equipment and facilities to ensure availability of reliable service.

(f) Partner with public health and public safety organizations to enhance public education activities and incident prevention.

Goal PHC 2.3: Protect life and property from natural hazards.

Rationale: Hazard mitigation is an essential part of ensuring continuity of businesses, schools, government services, utilities, and communities following hazard events.

Implementation

(a) Prepare a natural hazard assessment and vulnerability study for Harford County that evaluates the threat of various natural hazards and the degree of loss or damage that would result from a disaster.

(b) Ensure County agencies and partners have both a Continuity of Government (COG) and Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) to build redundancy and continuity into local government post disaster.

(c) Create a post disaster recovery plan.

(d) Reduce hazard vulnerability through mitigation measures such as purchasing repetitive loss properties, elevating structures within the floodplain, and updating the Floodplain Management Program.

(e) Educate and encourage property owners to take action to decrease their vulnerability to the impacts of natural hazards. Empower citizens with educational programs and information on emergency preparedness, emergency procedures and safety measures

(f) Require critical facilities, buildings and infrastructure to be designed and built to withstand catastrophic damage in the event of a disaster.

(g) Secure pre-disaster mitigation funds to construct storm shelters in public facilities such as parks, fairgrounds, or near other vulnerable public areas.

PROVIDE ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES FOR ALL HARFORD COUNTY RESIDENTS

Goal PHC 3.1: Develop opportunities for community gardens and urban farms.

Rationale: Community gardens and urban farms increase the availability of fresh fruits and vegetables and provide awareness of the environment and the science of cultivation, and incorporating it as a way of life.

Implementation

(a) Identify potential community garden/urban farm sites on parkland, public easements, and school grounds.

Urban farms and community gardens can provide nearly 44 pounds of food a year per 10 square feet.

(b) Provide classes on gardening and composting on small lots. Prioritize classes in neighborhoods that lack access to healthy foods and/or green space.

(c) Encourage local businesses to provide resources and help initiate community gardens.

(d) Utilize the Harford Cable Network to promote healthy eating habits, community events focusing on exercise and nutrition, and community gardening.

(e) Support the establishment of gardens and greenhouses in all schools.

(f) Support courses that teach gardening, nutrition, and healthy cooking.

(g) Encourage edible landscaping and urban orchards.



Community gardens offer a focal point for community organizing, and can lead to community-based efforts to deal with other social concerns.

Goal PHC 3.2: Encourage expansion of farm-to-table and farm to school programs.

Rationale: Quality locally sourced food should be available to all residents. Farm-to-table programs benefit farmers through increased revenue, and residents benefit from healthy, locally sourced fresh produce.

Implementation

(a) Work with Healthy Harford, Harford County Public Schools, and other youth organizations to promote farm tours highlighting the importance of farms and locally sourced foods.

(b) Strengthen opportunities for farmers by linking them to new markets; such as schools, colleges, and other institutional uses such as assisted living facilities.

(c) Establish an informational website and networking resource for all local food system resources and ecologically sound farming practices.

(d) Work with local restaurants to promote farm-to-table events and encourage use of locally sourced products.

Goal PHC 3.3: Support local food production and community based agricultural operations.

Rationale: Convenient access to fresh fruits and vegetable can help in the fight to reduce obesity and associated diseases.

Implementation

(a) Encourage farmers markets in the Rural Villages and convenient locations such as park and ride facilities.

(b) Review zoning and permitting regulations to ensure farmers markets and farm stands are compatible.

(c) Support farmers markets that allow for electronic benefit transfer (EBT) so that vulnerable populations can have access to healthy locally grown foods.

(d) Encourage Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) efforts and develop materials to promote them.

(e) Assess and plan for local food processing/wholesaling/distribution facilities to connect local agriculture to markets such as retailers, restaurants, schools, hospitals, and other institutions.

(f) Provide support for farmers who choose direct marketing of their products.

(g) Enhance the capacity to produce, process, distribute, and consume food locally and regionally.

(h) Encourage grocery stores and other retail outlets to sell locally sourced produce.

(i) Provide fast-track permitting for grocery stores that carry locally sourced food products.

(j) Identify areas in the County that lack access to healthy foods or supermarkets.

SUPPORT EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE DELIVERY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES THROUGHOUT HARFORD COUNTY

Goal PHC 4.1: Encourage development of diverse housing types with an emphasis on life-cycle housing.

Rationale: A diverse housing stock will attract new residents while allowing existing residents to continue to live in Harford County as their needs change.

Life-Cycle Housing accommodates the different stages of life which incorporates housing opportunities for first time buyers, families, older homeowners, and senior housing; including assisted living facilities and nursing homes. This creates a community with diverse demographics.

Implementation

- (a) Evaluate mixed use regulations and establish density bonuses for projects that incorporate affordable housing and healthy community design.
- (b) Encourage live/work units and expand home based business opportunities.
- (c) Encourage lifecycle housing by adopting regulations for accessory dwellings.
- (d) Provide and maintain options for intergenerational/life-cycle housing.
- (e) Maintain neighborhood continuity by targeting new affordable housing developments for existing residents and allow for “aging in place”.
- (f) Promote the redevelopment of the US 40 corridor to provide a range of housing opportunities.

(g) Develop design guidelines for new communities within the Development Envelope that promote quality affordable housing with an emphasis on building healthy and active communities.

(h) Develop strategies for homelessness prevention and creating permanent supportive housing opportunities.

(i) Collaborate with non-profit organizations and service providers that assist those experiencing homelessness, disabled individuals and families in need.

Goal PHC 4.2: Identify where vulnerable populations exist and where community services are lacking.

Rationale: Vulnerable populations are often located in areas where material and physical resources are lacking. By identifying where vulnerable populations exist, the County can target these areas to ensure access to quality medical care and other community services, especially during times of emergency.

Implementation

- (a) Collaborate with the Health Department, Housing and Community Development, and nonprofit organizations, including local faith-based and community-based organizations in order to identify, engage, and protect vulnerable citizens.
- (b) Actively engage and involve disadvantaged groups in planning in order to understand the culture of poverty and its impact on preparedness in the event of an emergency.
- (c) Develop plans for addressing the needs of non-institutionalized, home-bound older adult populations that may have limited access to health care and social services.

(d) Develop programs to educate the public and first responders on preparedness-related information specific to vulnerable populations, such as people with disabilities, economically disadvantaged, ethnic and racial minorities, pediatric, and rural populations.

(e) Develop public health preparedness, response, and recovery strategies and activities should include a strong focus on the needs of specific vulnerable populations.

(f) Work with local hospitals and health service providers to identify areas of the County that are insufficiently served and determine impediments to locating these services in underserved communities.

(g) Develop a fast track approval process for projects identified as critical to serving vulnerable populations.